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ABSTRACT

To assess the attitudes of Alabama public school speech-language pathologists toward various aspects of their employment, an attitudes assessment instrument was completed by 272 practicing public school clinicians. The first section of the instrument contained items pertaining to the respondents' years of experience, tenure status, and degree held. The second section consisted of a list of 14 factors affecting job satisfaction. Responses indicated that perceptions of positive relations with peers and supervisors, job security, having significant responsibilities, the achievement of program goals, and a reasonable salary contributed to an overall positive feeling about their positions. The clinicians felt negative with respect to their opportunity for advancement and the meaningfulness of the supervision they received. The fact that few of the state's public school speech-language clinicians were supervised by individuals with training in the discipline was felt to be the single most important factor in the clinicians' negative feelings concerning the supervision they received and their own opportunities for advancement. (Appended are the percentages and frequencies of responses as well as the job satisfaction scale.) (Author/HOD)

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JOB SATISFACTION AND THE ALABAMA PUBLIC SCHOOL SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGIST

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Job Satisfaction and the Alabama Public School Speech-Language Pathologist

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ABSTRACT

Fifty eight percent (272) of the 471 public school speech-language pathologists in Alabama completed a survey concerning their attitudes toward fourteen factors affecting their job satisfaction. Perceptions of positive relations with peers and supervisors, job security, having significant responsibilities, the achievement of program goals, and a reasonable salary contribute to an overall positive feeling about their positions. Alabama school clinicians feel negative with respect to their opportunity for advancement and the meaningfulness of the supervision they receive. The fact that few of the state's public school speech-language clinicians are supervised by individuals with training in the discipline may be the single most important factor in explaining the clinicians' negative feelings concerning the supervision they receive and their own opportunities for advancement.

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The attitudes of public school speech-language pathologists concerning their employment have received little attention. Only two investigations concerning the attitudes of public school clinicians toward their work have been reported (Miller and Potter, 1982; Mansour and Lingwall, 1985). Miller and Potter (1983), in an effort to assess burnout among speech-language pathologists, questioned 123 speech-language pathologists working in a variety of job settings (55% of whom were public school speech-language pathologists) about their relationships with colleagues, their overall feelings of success in the job, and their job satisfaction. Of the 76% of the respondents experiencing burnout, many reported being dissatisfied with their jobs, feeling ineffective, and feeling that their job status negatively affected their personal lives while, at the same time, feeling positive about their peer relationships. Mansour and Lingwall (1985) found 63% of 3141 speech-language pathologists employed in a variety of settings satisfied with their employment activities.

No studies focusing exclusively on the attitudes of public school clinicians have been reported. Knowledge of the attitudes this group of professionals hold toward such factors as job status, professional recognition, physical working conditions, potential for personal growth, the administrative milieu in which they operate, and the quality of supervision they receive might assist in the development of a better understanding of the unique role of the public school speech-language pathologist.

The purpose of this investigation was to assess attitudes of Alabama public school speech-language pathologists toward various aspects of their employment.

Methods

Attitudes Assessment Instrument

"A Job Satisfaction Scale for School Speech-Language Pathologists" (see Appendix) was constructed by the investigators for the purpose of surveying the attitudes of school clinicians toward various aspects of their employment situation. The first section of the instrument contains items pertaining to the respondents' years of experience, tenure status, and degree held. The second section consists of a list of fourteen factors affecting job satisfaction (for example, administrative policies, salary, job security, and position status). Following each factor listing is a five point scale with bipolar adjectives placed at

either end (for example, positive-negative, high-low, and satisfactory-unsatisfactory). Respondents are asked to place a mark on the scale indicating the proximity of their attitude to the bipolar adjective at each end of the scale.

Thirteen of the fourteen items included in the job satisfaction scale employed in this study are from Herzberg's (1964) list of sixteen factors affecting job satisfaction. The fourteenth item in the job satisfaction scale concerns the clinicians' overall feelings about their position. The bipolar adjective pairs associated with each job factor are from a list of adjective pairs suggested by Osgood, Suci, and Tannebaum (1957).

Subjects

The names and addresses of the subjects of the study were obtained from an Alabama Department of Education listing of speech-language pathologists employed in the public schools of Alabama.

Procedures

The job satisfaction scale along with a brief letter and a preaddressed stamped envelope to facilitate the return of the completed instrument were mailed to the 471 individuals on the list of practicing public school clinicians in Alabama.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis procedures were completed at the Seebeck Computer Center at the University of Alabama using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner, and Bent, 1975). Data analysis included a determination of the frequencies and percentages of the speech-language pathologists' responses to each of the fourteen job aspects being rated and to the three identification variables. A one-way analysis of variance was completed to determine if the subjects' responses to each of the fourteen rating scales varied from one another depending upon each of the clinician characteristics (for example, years of experience) assessed in the survey. Differences were considered statistically significant at the .05 or greater level of significance.

Results

Table 1 contains the frequencies and percentages of identifying characteristics of the 272 Alabama public school speech-language pathologists who returned completed job satisfaction survey forms. Seventy-three percent of the respondents have ten years or less experience, 72% are tenured, 53% hold a master's degree, and 39.9% hold the bachelor's degree. Seven percent of the subjects received training beyond the master's levels.

Table 2 displays the frequencies and percentages with which 272 Alabama public school speech-language pathologists indicated their attitudes toward fourteen factors relating to job satisfaction by selecting a given point on a five-point bipolar scale. Forty percent of the respondents consider their school system's administrative policies to be progressive while 30% feel they are regressive. Ninety percent of the respondents believe their interpersonal relations with peers are positive. Eighty percent of public school clinicians consider their position as being a highly responsible one. The status of the school speech-language pathologist is believed to be high by 38% of the subjects and to be low by 30% of the subjects. Fifty-nine percent of the school clinicians think the possibility of advancement is bad. Supervision by superiors is considered to be meaningless by 56% of the respondents. Seventy percent of the clinicians think their achievement of job goals is high. Eighty-three percent of the clinicians believe their job to be a secure one. Seventy-five percent of the clinicians feel their interpersonal relations with superiors are positive. Thirty nine percent of the public school clinicians think professional recognition is low while 33% think it is high. Forty-four percent of the clinicians believe the physical conditions under which they work are good while 41% think the conditions are bad. Possibilities of personal growth as a speech-language pathologist in the public schools are thought to

be high by 45% of the clinicians responding to the survey. Fifty-six percent of the clinicians think their salary is satisfactory while 25% think their salary is unsatisfactory. Sixty-nine percent of the clinicians report having positive overall feelings about their position.

Analysis of variance procedures indicate that significant differences exist between clinicians holding tenure and those not holding tenure with respect to their attitudes toward job security. Clinicians holding tenure feel significantly more secure in their positions than those not holding tenure ($P < .007$). No other differences exceeding the .05 level of confidence were observed between experience, tenure, or degree held and any of the other thirteen job factors under consideration.

Discussion

Alabama clinicians were found to hold "overall" positive feelings about their positions. They also indicated positive feelings toward the following job factors: interpersonal relations with peers and superiors, position responsibilities, achievement of job goals, job security, and salary. They feel negatively with respect to advancement possibilities and the supervision they receive from superiors. Approximately equal numbers of clinicians were positive and negative concerning the

following job factors: administrative policies, position status, professional recognition, and physical working conditions.

Positive Attitudes

Factors contributing to the clinicians' overall positive feelings about their work can be viewed as falling into two classes: factors over which clinicians have primary control and factors over which they have little or no control. Clinicians felt positively concerning the three job factors, out of the thirteen specific job factors assessed, primarily under their own control. They are: interpersonal relations with both peers and supervisors and achievement of job goals. These results might be interpreted as indicating the clinicians studied are positive individuals, particularly with respect to the factors in their lives for which they have primary responsibility. Such an interpretation lends credibility to the clinicians' expressions of negativism.

The clinicians' positivism concerning the salary factor is understandable in view of the fact that state-wide teacher salary increases ranging from 10% to 17% were mandated by the state legislature four times during the last ten years. At the time this survey was conducted, it was generally known that all Alabama teaching personnel would be receiving a second consecutive annual raise of 15%. Their positive feelings regarding job security are

to be expected with 72% of the teachers being tenured and with the statistically significant relationship observed between clinicians being tenured and feelings of job security. Because addressing the communicative problems of students is often the sole responsibility of the public school speech-language pathologist, it is not surprising to find clinicians considering their position responsibilities as being highly significant.

Negative Attitudes

Alabama clinicians feel negatively concerning their opportunities for advancement and the supervision they receive from their superiors. These results are understandable. Two-thirds of the 128 school systems in Alabama employ one or two speech-language pathologists and in only 2 of the 128 systems are the speech-language pathologists supervised by individuals holding a degree in the profession (Cash, Cooper, Hemm, Lammon, and Prickett, 1985). It is not surprising that clinicians operating in such environments feel advancement opportunities are limited and that the quality of supervision would be suspect. Only a very few of the clinicians can realistically hope to become a supervisor of other clinicians if they wish to remain in the system in which they are currently employed. Such a situation understandably would lead to feelings of being in a position in which advancement opportunities are limited. The paucity of

public school speech-language pathology supervisory positions in the state adds to such feelings. The fact that few Alabama public school clinicians are supervised by individuals with a background in communication sciences and disorders undoubtedly accounts for clinicians questioning the meaningfulness of the supervision they do receive.

Mixed Attitudes

Two-fifths of the clinicians feel the administrative policies of their school system are progressive rather than regressive while 30% feel they are regressive. In view of the fact that most of the clinicians feel the supervision they receive is more meaningless than meaningful, the finding that less than one-third of the clinicians view the administrative policies as being regressive is surprising. Because, typically, supervisors are the most significant channel of communication between employees and administrators, one might have expected a higher percent of the clinicians in this study to be negative with respect to their school system's administrative policies. The relatively low number (28%) of clinicians feeling opportunities for personal growth are limited is also surprising in view of the significant number of clinicians feeling their opportunities for professional advancement is limited. In addition, because many of these clinicians work in rural areas and in school systems where

contacts with other professionals of the same discipline is limited, one might expect the feelings of isolation and of a concomitant lack of personal growth potential to be greater than it was found to be. Apparently many public school clinicians seek personal growth through other than professional channels. This finding may suggest one of the more important factors underlying the clinicians' being positive in their overall feelings about their position.

Two-fifths of the clinicians rate the physical conditions under which they work as being "bad" while another two-fifths perceive the conditions as being "good". Apparently the lack of attractive physical facilities is not a primary factor in determining an individual's overall feeling of job satisfaction. The finding that only slightly more of the clinicians felt their position to be a high status position than felt it to be a low status position can be interpreted as being symptomatic of the public's current low regard for members of the educational establishment. This same state of affairs may help explain why two-fifths of the clinicians feel their position receives low professional recognition. In addition, the lack of speech-language pathologists in supervisory positions in the state might suggest to the clinicians that their discipline lacks recognition by public school administrators.

Summary and Conclusions

Two hundred seventy two Alabama public school speech-language pathologists responded to a survey of their attitudes toward fourteen job factors. Results indicate school clinicians are positive about more aspects of their position than they are negative. Perceptions of positive relations with peers and supervisors, job security, having significant responsibilities, the achievement of program goals, and a reasonable salary contribute to an overall positive feeling about their positions. Alabama school clinicians feel negative with respect to their opportunities for advancement and the meaningfulness of the supervision they receive. The fact that few of the state's public school speech-language clinicians are supervised by individuals with training in the discipline may be the single most important factor in explaining the clinicians' negative feelings concerning the supervision they receive and their own opportunities for advancement.

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APPENDIX

FIGURE 1

A JOB SATISFACTION SCALE FOR SCHOOL SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS

DIRECTIONS: Mark the appropriate box.
Yrs. of Experience: 0-3☐ 4-7☐ 8-10☐ 10-20☐ 20+☐
Tenured? Yes☐ No☐
Degree Held: BS☐ MA☐ MA+30☐ Doctorate☐

DIRECTIONS: Above each scale is a word or phrase indicating one aspect of your employment situation. Both ends of each scale are adjectives which you might use to indicate your degree of satisfaction with the particular job aspect being rated. If either word at the ends of the scale reflect accurately your assessment, you would place a mark on the short line closest to that word. If neither word reflects your assessment, you would place a mark on the middle of the five short lines. If either word **moderately** reflects your assessment, you would mark on the second line away from the word that suggests, at least moderately, your feelings about the job aspect being evaluated.

ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES:
Progressive_____ _____ _____ _____ _____Regressive

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS WITH PEERS:
Positive_____ _____ _____ _____ _____Negative

POSITION RESPONSIBILITIES:
High_____ _____ _____ _____ _____Low

POSITION STATUS:
High_____ _____ _____ _____ _____Low

POSSIBILITIES FOR ADVANCEMENT:
Good_____ _____ _____ _____ _____Bad

SUPERVISION BY SUPERIORS:
Meaningful_____ _____ _____ _____ _____Meaningless

ACHIEVEMENT OF JOB GOALS:
High_____ _____ _____ _____ _____Low

JOB SECURITY:
High_____ _____ _____ _____ _____Low

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS WITH SUPERIORS:
Positive_____ _____ _____ _____ _____Negative

PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION:
High_____ _____ _____ _____ _____Low

PHYSICAL WORKING CONDITIONS:
Good_____ _____ _____ _____ _____Bad

POSSIBILITY OF PERSONAL GROWTH WITHIN JOB SETTING:
High_____ _____ _____ _____ _____Low

SALARY:
Satisfactory_____ _____ _____ _____ _____Unsatisfactory

OVERALL FEELINGS ABOUT YOUR POSITION:
Positive_____ _____ _____ _____ _____Negative

(Prickett and Cooper, 1985)

Table 1. Frequency and percentages of identifying characteristics of 272 Alabama public school speech-language pathologists responding to a 1985 job satisfaction survey.

	Years Experience					Tenure Status		Degree Held			
	0-3	4-7	8-10	10-20	20+	Yes	No	BS	MA	MA+30	Doc
Frequency	50	80	66	69	3	175	68	107	141	17	3
Percent	18.7	29.9	24.6	25.6	1.1	72.0	28.0	39.9	52.6	6.3	1.1

Table 2. Frequencies and percentages with which 272 Alabama public school speech-language pathologists indicated their attitudes toward various aspects of their employment by selecting a given point on a five-point bipolar scale.

Positive	5	4	3	2	1	Negative
Administrative Policies						
Progressive						Regressive
Frequency	30	75	79	56	24	
Percent	11.4	28.4	29.9	21.2	9.1	
Interpersonal Relations with Peers						
Positive						Negative
Frequency	161	80	22	5	3	
Percent	59.4	29.5	8.1	1.8	1.1	
Position Responsibility						
High						Low
Frequency	113	104	36	13	5	
Percent	41.7	38.4	13.3	4.8	1.8	
Position Status						
High						Low
Frequency	29	74	86	53	29	
Percent	10.7	27.3	31.7	19.6	10.7	
Possibilities for Advancement						
Good						Bad
Frequency	8	32	71	64	96	
Percent	3.0	11.8	26.2	23.6	35.4	
Supervision by Superior						
Meaningful						Meaningless
Frequency	20	49	50	75	77	
Percent	7.4	18.1	18.5	27.7	28.4	
Achievement of Job Goals						
High						Low
Frequency	57	133	51	22	7	
Percent	21.1	49.3	18.9	8.1	2.6	
Job Security						
High						Low
Frequency	145	79	31	11	4	
Percent	53.7	29.3	11.5	4.1	1.5	
Interpersonal Relations with Superiors						
Positive						Negative
Frequency	135	69	42	19	6	
Percent	49.8	25.5	15.5	7.0	2.2	
Professional Recognition						
High						Low
Frequency	25	64	76	50	55	
Percent	9.3	23.7	28.1	18.5	20.4	
Physical Working Conditions						
Good						Bad
Frequency	65	56	40	62	49	
Percent	23.9	20.6	14.7	22.8	18.0	
Possibilities of Personal Growth						
High						Low
Frequency	28	94	72	43	34	
Percent	10.3	34.7	26.6	15.9	12.5	
Salary						
Satisfactory						Unsatisfactory
Frequency	48	105	51	40	28	
Percent	17.6	38.6	18.8	14.7	10.3	
Overall Feelings About Position						
Positive						Negative
Frequency	76	110	56	18	10	
Percent	28.1	40.7	20.7	6.7	3.7	

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